

Squatters stole our house says ex-tenant

Three 90-year-olds and forced out in rush to empty building

Marc Mullen

A FORMER rent-paying resident kicked out of a Hampstead mansion has slammed the housing association for handing it over to squatters.

As revealed in the Ham&High two weeks ago, Circle Anglia, the owners of the Fitzjohn's Avenue house, last month signed an agreement allowing a group of squatters to stay there free-of-charge.

And the unprecedented move has infuriated Marilyn Daish, 60, who was told to leave the house after 10 years because the association desperately needed to sell it.

Circle Anglia claimed the mansion was emptied a year ago, with previous tenants leaving of their own free will.

But Ms Daish, who rented a flat in the house from 1994 until April 2004, says it was far from voluntary and caused huge upset to the residents, many of whom were elderly.

Ms Daish said: "Three of the residents were in their nineties, very frail and very old. It is appalling how they moved these elderly people out under false pretences and then let squatters in.

"They were asking one to prove that she had a right to a flat – it was so stressful. They kept saying they needed us out quickly, but we could still be there now instead of having gone through the stress of the whole thing."

"One of the old ladies had mental health problems. She had been in a Polish concentration camp during the war. For her the whole thing was very traumatic."

The former teacher, who now lives in Tufnell Park and works with the elderly, last saw her neighbours in spring 2005.

She said: "When I went back in December they were gone and all their post had been dumped in a green recycling bin.

"The housing association refused to give me their number so that I could get back in touch. They said they'd give her my details and get her to call me. She never did. She didn't like using the telephone.

"When I spoke to the housing association they went into this big thing about how I should have handed my key back. They don't seem too fussy now – they've got squatters."

The semi-detached house was originally owned by the United Women's Housing Association, an organisation which originated from the suffragette movement.

The flats and bedsits were offered to women on low incomes and pensioners.

A Circle Anglia spokeswoman, when questioned about why the company allowed squatters in after evicting vulnerable residents said: "If a resident said they didn't want to move we would not have forced them to leave.

"It was necessary to undertake redevelopment works at Fitzjohn's Avenue, so that the property could be refurbished to meet the decent homes standard.

"Therefore, our residents have been moved to high-quality, one bedroom, self-contained flats."

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Picture by Nigel Sultan



Top: Marilyn Daish outside the Fitzjohn's Avenue house.
Bottom: Marilyn with former housemates in happier times.

FACTFILE

Tax still needs to be paid
THE squatters on Fitzjohn's Avenue may be living rent-free but they will soon be forced to cough up for council tax.

Following the Ham&High's September 28 story, Camden Council has begun discussions with the housing association to

identify the squatters who have been in the house since June.

A council spokeswoman said: "We will be following standard procedure. We are currently talking to Circle Anglia about who is living there. We will be sending out enquiry forms and billing the appropriate people."